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Mysore Classes

Mysore, what is that?
Mysore is a place in Southern India where the founder of Ashtanga Yoga, Pattabhi Jois, and his teacher Krishnamacharya first started teaching Ashtanga Yoga.

Classes were taught in the tradition of Krishnamacharya, who individualized yoga for each person present in the room. Therefore he did not guide the entire class



through a “routine”. Instead he taught individually to each person in the class. In the Ashtanga series, even though each person will learn the same postures, how each person does the postures is different, and how quickly each person progresses is different. In a Mysore class the entire class is not cued simultaneously, each person does their own personal practice with the teacher present to give assists, new postures, advice, or modifications for



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tightness or pain, etc. This is how we individualize the Ashtanga Practice!

Teaching this way came to be called Mysore classes because that is how you practiced when you went to Mysore, India. Even though Pattabhi Jois taught the ashtanga sequence to many people he still gave individual adjustments to each person depending on what they needed -- and different people were in different stages of learning the practice.

What I like about teaching yoga in a mysore style class is that I can give more individual attention and better adapt the practice to each person than if I was teaching a led class, where I am leading/cuing the entire class at once through the sequence.

Mysore is often misunderstood as a class only for advanced students. This couldn't be further from the truth. The safest and best way to learn the Ashtanga method is within a Mysore setting. On the contrary led classes are for the more advanced! You need to know the practice and know your body in the postures before you can follow along at someone else's cue and pace . . .

MYSORE FOR BEGINNERS

In a Mysore class as a beginner, you get to learn one-on-one from the teacher from the first day. For example when you first start mysore style as a beginner I will teach you only the first Sun Salute -- 1:1. I will teach you the sanskrit name, help you do it within your capabilities, help you align correctly in it, and adjust you where needed. You get to learn the posture by hearing, seeing, and feeling.

ॐ Some of us learn best by hearing (vata personalities), some best by seeing (pitta personalities), some best by feeling (kapha personalities).

In this way no matter how you best learn, it is covered :)

After learning the starting sun salute, I will teach you the three finishing lotus flower postures and let you take rest. Then you can observe the class if you like getting a better idea of the ashtanga practice, or you can repeat what you learned to help instill it in your body and mind (and heart ;).

ॐ At my studio I also like to teach beginners in a beginner class; at the start of the class I take a few moments to teach the breathing (maybe the bandhas), moving and breathing synchronicity, and explain a little of the theory or philosophy behind the practice, etc. I then lead the class through the first half of primary series (up through Navasana) -- giving extra cues, spending a little more time in the postures, and skipping lots of vinyasas (for example janu sirsansan a,b,c then one vinyasa -- marichyasana a,b,c,d then one vinyasa . . .). **This is often helpful for a beginner to experience enough of the practice to get the "release" or the "yoga high" from the deep breathing and removal of stress and tension.**

ॐ After some time in the beginner classes -- depending on each person anywhere from one to six months -- I prefer to teach the rest of primary individually, Mysore style. This is favorable over jumping into full primary with closing inversions . . .



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- To learn Full Primary; come to Mysore, practice up to navasana (as in a beginner class) then I will give you the one next pose, bhujapidasana, and help you with it. The next time you come you will practice up through bhujapidasana, then I will give you the next pose and help you with it . . . and on it goes until you have full primary. This is the ideal way to learn full primary as you are only getting one new pose each class -- and you are getting my individual attention with it as you learn it for the first time.

Each time you come back to a Mysore class the length and intensity of the practice gradually builds allowing your body time to adapt to the postures and the practice.

You will also remember the sequence this way! It is much harder to remember the sequence when you are led through 55 postures at once (full primary series plus closing is approx. 55 postures (and 50+ vinyasas!).

REMEMBERING THE SEQUENCE

IT IS OK TO BE A MYSORE BEGINNER! I have noticed many people feel self-conscious about being new in a yoga class. We all had to be new to a yoga class at some point, we have all been in the position of not knowing what to expect, not knowing how our bodies will perform. It's ok, so relax. It's ok if you do something "wrong", it's ok to be a bit confused . . . over time just like anything else you do repeatedly, you figure it out.

If you have already been practicing ashtanga in led classes making the transition to mysore classes can be a bit daunting -- or even challenging emotionally. In this case **RELAX** :) It's also OK to be a Mysore beginner. This is a yoga school and you are here to learn. I will help you remember the order of the poses (no matter how many times you forget them!), as will some of the others in the class as we have a nice yoga community at our studio.

When you are able to remember the sequence it allows you to better focus internally. When you do not know what the next posture is you are focusing outside of yourself -- on the teacher, instead of your own breathing and meditative mind.

- ☪ When you allow yourself to be in your meditative mind you will be pleasantly surprised by a mechanism in your body called "**muscle memory**". Muscle memory is each muscles innate intelligence -- once you start doing something that you have done repeatedly your muscles remember what to do without having to use your brain. Thus relying on your muscle memory will put you in your meditative mind as you do not have to engage your mind for the next posture.

- Many people block this mechanism but worrying too much or over-thinking the sequence.

To Make transitioning to Mysore classes a bit easier . . . (for the first time at my studio!) you can use a cheat sheet . . .



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- ॐ Cheat sheets -- or diagrams of the poses are not preferable in a mysore class. **However, if it makes you feel more comfortable and that makes it easier for you to try a mysore class, then bring a cheat sheet ;)** (When following a cheat sheet you might not get as much help from the teacher and therefore the practice will not be individualized as well as it would be with a teachers guidance.)
- There is a “preferred mysore cheat sheet” -- it is a list of the poses in Sanskrit only! No pictures . . . Sanskrit works vibrationally on the body, helping your body to feel the pose on a vibraional level. Here is a link to my website where all the postures of first, second, and third are listed in Sanskrit only: http://www.befityoga.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/ashtanga_yoga_series.pdf
- ॐ If you have been coming to led classes, you can re-Learn the Ashtanga practice in a Mysore Class: Practice as far as you remember, the teacher will then give you one more asana which you will practice, then you close. Next time it will be easier to remember your one new asana (it is easier to remember one thing at a time . . . vs. trying to memorize all of primary which is 55 postures . . .) -- you practice up thourgh your new asana, get the next asana, close/rest, etc. And on it goes . . . You will remember the sequence better by adding on one posture at a time. Btw, Enjoy the shorter practice! You get to focus on your “new” posture -- give it a little more time and energy allowing your body and mind to soak it up.

In this way you learn the yoga, you can do it anytime, any place, you do not need a studio or a teacher present every day (but you still need a studio and teacher to learn more, progress, get adjustments ;). When you practice at home or in a mysore class the practice is much closer to your heart.

JUST WHAT ARE LED CLASSES FOR THEN?

When Pattabhi Jois started his world tours he began teaching led classes to teach the vinyasa counts – how to move in and out of the postures keeping pace with your breath. (However in a led class you are at the mercy of the teachers count and timing of your breath . . .). You learn the postures and how they fit your body better in Mysore classes. When you have learned the full sequence mysore style, you are ready to take a led class and learn the vinyasa counts -- the moving and breathing synchronization.

- ॐ Then you can do some led classes when you come to the studio and some mysore classes each week. In the led classes you’ll get the vinyasa counts -- to learn how to move and breathe in and out of the postures keeping a flow, removing fidgets, removing mindstuff, keeping a gentle flow of intensity where its necessary, and relaxing where you can or where it’s necessary.

BALANCING THE INTENSITY

Another benefit of practicing in the mysore style (and with home practice too!) is you can have days where you move more gently through your practice and days where you have more energy and can go deeper, work more jumps, arm balances, etc. -- all the while performing the same postures :) This natural variation trains you to listen to your bodies internal cues -- not to turn to



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external sources pulling you further away from what you need on a particular day. This will also prevent the likliness of injury.

- ॐ Even throughout one practice it is good to vary the intensity. Latest research has shown that interval training reaps the most benefit (and that long distance anything is hard on the body!), meaning you have short bursts of work intermixed with bouts of rest. In your practice this could look like: Jumping and flowing quicker in the sun salutes and standing poses, resting during the seated asana, taking most vinyasas -- but not all (is our body really meant to take 50 vinyasas in an hour or so? If its an energetic day take more vinyasa, if its a softer day skip lots of vinyasa), working harder on the arm balances and the more challenging poses (for example in primary keep your intensity from navasana through supta kurmasana), then slow down again in the asana -- let your body relax, skip some vinyasas, etc. If you are practicing 2nd or 3rd then you get another bout of intensity at the end with backbending, drop backs, handstands, tics, tic-tocs . . . have fun with all that ;) Then sit down to paschimattanasn-aaaahh and take closing slow and relaxed winding down to rest pose.
- ॐ Led classes can be more intense as you can not just stop and rest . . . you are following the cue of the person teaching, usually the cue does not slow down for the more challenging postures.

In a Mysore class is also the best way to learn some of the “tricks” and fun stuff in the practice, for example jumping through or jumping back, handstands and arm balances, etc. These are best taught in Mysore classes where I can give only you my full attention while you learn something new, individualize it to what you need, and help you do it a few times.

Mysore is the safest place to learn 2nd and 3rd series, The series have some advanced postures that need the individual guidance of a teacher present 1:1 with the student.

- ॐ To learn Intermediate; come to Mysore, practice full primary and at the end of full primary (setu bandhasana) I will give you the first 2nd series pose and help you with it. The next time you come I will give you the 2nd pose in 2nd series and help you with it . . . etc. Once you learn up to Eka Pada Sirsasana -- or pincha mayurasana depending on when you are ready to split primary and second series into 2 different practices, you will no longer have to do full primary--you can enter 2nd series after parsvottanasana. Then you practice primary series one day and second series the next day.

Learning in the mysore method is very empowering -- and good for home and daily practice, you know the postures -- and can do it anywhere, any time, teacher present or not.

- ॐ It can be helpful transitioning your focus from a physical one to a devotional nature -- practicing daily for the inner connection makes it much easier to get to your mat -- at home or in a mysore class -- than going there for the physical work out (yoga is a work in :) this weaves the inner-yoga deeper into our lives where our spirituality is not so compartmentalized.



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If you are unsure you want to try a mysore class, come and observe a mysore class. It is fun to see different people in the same series and how each posture is different on each person, it is also fun to see different series going on all in the same class. Its relaxing and meditative to hear the deep breathing, see the work and the sweat and the tensions leaving bodies . . . it will make you want to jump right in and start learning ;)

Mysore classes are a win-win situation, you get to follow your own breath, yet be with a group and share the group energy, and get personal assistance in each pose you need it in. Mysore classes are better for your schedule as well, in a Mysore class I can accommodate beginners, long time practitioners, those practicing primary, second, third . . . if I had to have a separate class for each of those you would have less options as to when you can come. There is only one or two "prime" times each day that accommodate most people.

READY TO TRY A MYSORE CLASS?

Here are some tips and etiquette that may help you feel more at ease joining a mysore class. Please do not worry if you do not remember these, you will learn them ok in the classes too, this is only to help you feel more comfortable coming into a mysore class:

Mysore etiquette

- ॐ Don't hesitate to call the teacher over to you if you have a question or an area you want help with!! This is the biggest benefit of the Mysore class-getting individual attention where you want it (and sometimes maybe where you don't want it . . .). Even if the class is busy, it is ok to stop your practice and wait for the teacher (if you are worried about losing heat you can do handstands or sun salutes while you wait). I do this in Mysore classes with Nancy, I sometimes have to wait for her assistance, and if she does not see me waiting I will signal her by giving a little wave. So it OK to call me over! Please do! as I want to offer assistance where you want it -- and I am not a mind reader . . . so I may miss your energy trying to call me over . . .
- ॐ When you are getting assisted in a pose do not do vinyasa between sides, just switch sides. While you take vinyasa I may step away to assist someone else and then I may forget to assist you on your other side.
- ॐ When being assisted in a pose where you have no questions, you just want to be put in the pose -- be ready to go when I get there, try not to make the teacher wait on you.
- ॐ When an instructor is in a Mysore class practicing please let him/her do their practice. It is tempting to ask them questions and ask for their help, but we sometimes have the need to just be a student and let someone else teach!
- ॐ ENJOY YOUR PRACTICE and have a little fun. A change I have noticed recently in mysore classes is that people are taking themselves way to seriously. As important as it is to "put your tongue on the roof of your mouth and breathe" and maintain a nice flow to your



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practice, its also ok to occasionally make a comment or a giggle connecting with your yogi friends and neighbors . . . Just not through your entire practice . . . Pattabhi Jois had fun in his classes.

Other etiquette in general no matter which class you are taking at a yoga studio, mysore or led:

- ॐ Please refrain from eating 3–4 hours prior to practice
- ॐ Please bathe before practice . . . !! Especially if you have had a stressful day.
- ॐ Please ensure your yoga clothes, mat, rug, towel and other yoga gear are clean and odor free
- ॐ Please keep area around your mat free of objects . . . glasses and such could get stepped on by me!
- ॐ Please refrain from wearing any and all scented products (perfumes, deoderants, etc). As your body heats up these scents are amplified by the heat. Many people (including me!) are allergic to perfume.
- ॐ Please refrain from wearing lotions and moisturizers (makes skin slippery making it difficult to adjust safely). Oils are a bit better and have less chemicals and are better for your skin. Just don't oil up right before coming to class . . .
- ॐ Please communicate any injuries or illnesses to the teacher
- ॐ Enjoy your practice

So please come and experience a Mysore class -- enjoy following your own breath in the practice, and see there is nothing to fear 😊